

Literacies for Learning

Guide for Administrators and Other Facilitators of Teachers' Learning

For some, literacy is a technology; for others, a cognitive consequence; for still others, a set of cultural relationships; yet for others, a part of the highest human impulse to think and rethink experience Literacy is a complex phenomenon, making problems of perspective and definition inevitable. Literacy is also something of real value, making struggle around it unlikely to end.

Brandt, 1990, 1

Literacy is about more than reading and writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Literacy...finds its place in our lives alongside other ways of communicating. Indeed, literacy itself takes many forms: on paper, on the computer screen, on TV, on posters and signs. Those who use literacy take it for granted – but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today's world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of "literacy as freedom."

UNESCO statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003 –2012,

**Quoted in Think Literacy Success: Report of the expert panel on students at risk in Ontario, 2003, 7*

We are long beyond the stage of accepting basic literacy—the ability to read and write one's own name—as the norm for the general population. We have also passed beyond the stage of wanting functional literacy for all—a set of relatively simple abilities to comprehend and produce written text at home, in the streets and in the workplace. What we have come to realize is needed is "critical literacy"...the direction of those functional skills towards the ability to mount a personal critique of all those issues which surround us as we live, learn and work—to help us understand, comment on and ultimately control the direction of our lives.

Withers, 1989, p. 76, quoted in Fehring and Green, 2001, 7.

* Green uses this quotation to encapsulate seminal thinking about literacy

Whereas one was once considered literate if one could sign one's name, today being literate requires a complex and sophisticated set of attitudes, habits of mind, cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, understanding of communities of practice, and stances toward issues of identity, equity, power, and social justice.

This Guide is a working document that will continue to evolve in consultation with researchers, policy makers, stakeholders and educators in the field.

This guide book launches a conversation that will enrich, deepen, and complicate our understanding of literacy and its role in learning, work, and living. This guide is built on the premise that literacy is neither reducible to skills nor to 'good' instruction, though these constitute important components.

Despite flux, ongoing research, animated discussion, inherent complexities, and the challenges of practical application, there is remarkable convergence of thought and conceptual stability regarding literacy.

This guide provides a framework in which to consider embedding literacy instruction into curriculum delivery. The six broad organizers—Equity, Assessment and Evaluation, Curriculum, Learning, Learning Tools, and Teaching—are essential dimensions of any high quality program.

Every effort has been made to align these indicators with Ministry priorities, the Ontario curriculum, current research and thinking about literacy, Leadership Frameworks for Principals and Vice-Principals and for Supervisory Officers, the principles in *Think Literacy Success: Report of the expert panel on students at risk in Ontario, 2003*, and major organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and the National Staff Development Council. As the literacy initiative for Grades 7-12 moves forward, this guide will be informed by other voices and perspectives.

Leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student outcomes. Principals and vice-principals play an essential role as school leaders to achieve this impact.

*Purpose to Practice: Putting Ontario's Leadership Framework into Action
A Guide for School and System Leaders*

This guide is intended to serve as a framework and conversation-starter. As ‘agents of change,’ administrators and leaders can use this guide:

- as a framework for classroom observation, identifying and discussing the areas to observe beforehand with the teacher
- to assist teachers in developing an individual action plan for growth, identifying 1-3 goals for a term, semester, or year
- to develop an *Agenda for Action* with a department, division, or school.

The indicators do not so much *define* as *point to* rich and multi-faceted classroom realities and discipline-specific manifestations. For this reason, administrators and leaders are encouraged to consult subject-specific versions of these indicators, for example, indicators for Mathematics and English, to fully appreciate the priorities, concrete forms, and pedagogies of literacy in each.

Moving Literacies for Learning Forward

High-level Indicators for Principals and other Facilitators of Teacher Learning

Evidence-based ways to make a difference in students' achievement

Equity

Literacy, in all its forms, is an equity issue.

- Increasingly inclusive classrooms that reflect diverse cultural knowledge and practices; support anti-discrimination education; appeal to both genders; value and build on the knowledge, experiences, and literacies *all* learners bring to school
 - A shift from high expectations for some to high expectations for *all*, and provision of strong, scaffolded support as needed
 - A shift from English as the sole language of the classroom to acceptance of strategic use of first language for learning
 - Increased use of differentiated instruction and assessment based on data
 - Increased use and explicit teaching of literacy and learning strategies that benefit all (universal design)
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Curriculum

Subject specialists have a collective responsibility for developing literacies for learning.

- A shift from lessons as a series of activities to lessons as integral to an instructional trajectory based on overall curriculum expectations in which structured lessons link back to prior learning and link forward to next steps
 - A shift from literacy as an add-on to recognition of the explicit and implicit embedding of literacies for learning in curriculum expectations
 - Increasingly thoughtful selection and use of literacy and learning strategies based on matching deep structure and principles to curriculum concepts and skills
 - Increasingly explicit support of learners' strategic and metacognitive skill development
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Assessment and Evaluation

Educators need to know how and whether they're making a difference in students' literacy knowledge and skills.

- A shift from one-size-fits-all summative evaluation to ongoing assessment of literacy needs and learning, and consequent adjustment of learning goals, instruction and assessments
 - A shift from a single summative evaluation to multiple and varied opportunities for learners to demonstrate the full range of what they know and can do, and to opportunities for learners to act on feedback
 - Increased student understanding of learning goals and criteria for assessment, and increased opportunities to reflect on their progress
 - A shift from individual to collaborative teacher planning, development, and marking of assessments
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Learning

Literacy development requires opportunities for making meaning, and engaging in productive social interaction and talk.

- A shift from rote learning and recall to developing conceptual understanding, making connections, reorganizing information, thinking critically, and engaging in the stance of critical literacy that compels social action
 - A shift from teachers as questioners to teachers and students as questioners
 - A shift from students working independently to structures that enable cooperative learning and engage students in productive interaction and talk
 - Increased integrated opportunities to communicate and think through the processes of speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, and representing
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Whereas the technologies of print previously defined literacy, new technologies are broadening notions of text and creating new literacies. Print literacies are not eclipsed, but rather exist in a new context.

Learning Tools

- Increasing respect for and active connecting with technological knowledge and skills, and the digital backgrounds students bring to school
- Increasing use of tools and technologies by all to learn, explore, and communicate understanding
- Increasing focus on problem solving and higher-order thinking as new tools and technologies obviate the need to spend time on lower-order skills

Literacies for learning can be embedded when teachers develop a pedagogy of literacy for their discipline.

Teaching Practices

- A shift from use of a single resource to use of a range of resources, including some self-selected by learners
 - A shift from rigid reliance on one teaching approach and one authoritative perspective to flexibility in approach, co-construction of meaning, and exploration of a variety of perspectives
 - Increasing understanding of adolescent literacy development and challenges
 - Increasingly thoughtful and coherent use of literacy and learning strategies—explicit, systematic, understanding of the conditions for effective strategy instruction, modeling, and application
 - Shift from fixed seating arrangements and student groupings to flexible groupings based on goals and needs
 - A shift from rapid, closed question-response sequences that focus on recall, to open-ended questions that engage all learners in higher-order thinking and that prompt learners to explore various ways of thinking, such as describing, analyzing, integrating, comparing, and explaining
 - Increased understanding that literacy knowledge and skills bear a reciprocal relationship to engagement and motivation
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The indicators in this resource are aligned with and support:

1. The Leadership Framework for Principals and Vice-Principals

Part 1: Leader Practices and Competencies

The principal sets high expectations for learning outcomes and monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of instruction. The principal manages the school effectively so that everyone can focus on teaching and learning.

Practices:

The principal:

- ensures a consistent and continuous school-wide focus on student achievement, using system and school data to monitor progress
- ensures that learning is at the centre of planning and resource management
- develops professional learning communities to support school improvement
- participates in the recruitment, hiring and retention of staff with the interest and capacity to further the school's goals
- provides resources in support of curriculum instruction and differentiated instruction
- buffers staff from distractions that detract from student achievement
- implements strategies which secure high standards of student behaviour and attendance
- fosters a commitment to equity of outcome and to closing the achievement gap

Competencies:

Skills

The principal is able to:

- demonstrate the principles and practice of effective teaching and learning
- access, analyse and interpret data
- initiate and support an inquiry-based approach to improvement in teaching and learning
- establish and sustain appropriate structures and systems for effective management of the school
- make organizational decisions based on informed judgements
- manage time effectively
- support student character development strategies

Knowledge

The principal has knowledge and understanding of:

- strategies for improving achievement
- effective pedagogy and assessment
- use of new and emerging technologies to support teaching and learning
- models of behaviour and attendance management
- strategies for ensuring inclusion, diversity and access
- curriculum design and management
- tools for data collection and analysis
- school self-evaluation
- strategies for developing effective teachers and leaders
- project management for planning and implementing change
- legal issues
- the importance of effective student character development

Attitudes

The principal demonstrates:

- commitment to raising standards for all students
- commitment to equity of outcome and closing the achievement gap
- belief in meeting the needs of all students in diverse ways
- commitment to sustaining a safe, secure and healthy school environment
- commitment to upholding human rights

2. Teacher Performance Appraisal Domains and Competencies

Commitment to Pupils and Pupil Learning

- CP1 Teachers demonstrate commitment to the well-being and development of all pupils.
- CP2 Teachers are dedicated in their efforts to teach and support pupil learning and achievement.
- CP3 Teachers teach all pupils equitably and with respect.
- CP4 Teachers provide an environment for learning that encourages pupils to be problem solvers, decision makers, lifelong learners, and contributing members of a changing society.

Professional Knowledge

- PK1 Teachers know their subject matter, the Ontario curriculum, and education-related legislation.
- PK2 Teachers know a variety of effective teaching and assessment practices.
- PK3 Teachers know a variety of effective classroom management strategies.
- PK4 Teachers know how pupils learn and factors that influence pupil learning and achievement.

Professional practice

- PP1 Teachers use their professional knowledge and understanding of pupils, curriculum, legislation, teaching practices, and classroom management strategies to promote the learning and achievement of their pupils.
- PP2 Teachers communicate effectively with pupils, parents, and colleagues.
- PP3 Teachers conduct ongoing assessment of pupils' progress, evaluate their achievement, and report results to pupils and parents regularly.
- PP4 Teachers adapt and refine their teaching practices through continuous learning and reflection, using a variety of sources and resources.
- PP5 Teachers use appropriate technology in their teaching practice and related professional responsibilities.

Leadership in Learning Communities

- LL1 Teachers collaborate with other teachers and school colleagues to create and sustain learning communities in their classrooms and in their schools.
- LL2 Teachers work with other professionals, parents, and researchers of the community to enhance pupil learning, pupil achievement, and school programs.

Ongoing Professional Learning

- PL1 Teachers engage in ongoing professional learning and apply it to improve their teaching practices.

Ministry of Education, *Performance Appraisal of Experienced Teachers: Technical Requirements Manual*, 2007. p. 22.

3. National Staff Development Council (NSDC) Standards (Revised, 2001)

Context Standards--Staff development that improves the learning of all students:

- Organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district. (Learning Communities)
- Requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement. (Leadership)
- Requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration. (Resources)

Process Standards--Staff development that improves the learning of all students:

- Uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement. (Data-Driven)
- Uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact. (Evaluation)
- Prepares educators to apply research to decision making. (Research-Based)
- Uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal. (Design)
- Applies knowledge about human learning and change. (Learning)
- Provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate. (Collaboration)

Content Standards--Staff development that improves the learning of all students:

- Prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement. (Equity)
- Deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately. (Quality Teaching)
- Provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately. (Family Involvement)

National Staff Development Council, <http://www.nsdcc.org/standards/index.cfm>